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## **Faulkner's Protest against Hollywood: The Creation of a Cinematic Structure and Its Deliberate Destruction in *Pylon***

NISHIOKA Karen

### **Introduction**

It has always been considered that William Faulkner never seemed to agree with Hollywood even though he spent considerable years in Hollywood working as a screenwriter. In fact, once, he confessed to his lover Meta Carpenter, who was working as a script clerk in Hollywood, that he could not write novels there: “ ‘I’ll never get it written in this town. Sometimes I think if I do one more treatment or screenplay, I’ll lose whatever power I have as a writer’ ” (Wilde 309). There is also a famous saying of Faulkner that when he wrote novels, “[h]e told Malcolm Cowley, to lock his movie work ‘off into another room’” (Kawin 136). Many critics have tried to exclude the Hollywood influence on Faulkner when doing research on his novels because it was widely considered that since Faulkner was anti-Hollywood and would not have consciously allowed films to influence his writings, it is meaningless to analyze them in the filmic perspective. However, it is necessary that the influence of Hollywood on Faulkner receives more serious scholarly attention. Faulkner started writing screenplays in 1932, when he was thirty-five, and his relationship with Hollywood lasted until 1955. So naturally, whether he liked it or not, experiences in Hollywood affected his writing novels. One of the most distinct examples is *Pylon* (1932). Faulkner wrote *Pylon* just after he finished his stint at MGM studio.

*Pylon* is a minor novel of Faulkner. Bruce F. Kawin criticized this novel quite tartly: “the novel is pretentious and overwritten, baffled by its own material, hopeless” (46). One of the reasons why this novel has not been taken seriously among scholars is that it is considered as the most “cinematic” novel among other Faulkner’s critically acclaimed novels. Tom Dardis argues that it erupts a kind of symptomatic expression of Faulkner’s antipathy against almost everything he saw in Hollywood. He states as follows:

He [Faulkner] often called it [Hollywood] “that damned West Coast place,”

and he really seems to have had it in his mind when he wrote angrily and furiously about the “New Valois” of Pylon.... (Dardis 114)

Robert W. Hamblin regrets that Faulkner’s writing style had changed after he worked for Hollywood and was forced to adopt a way of writing that is simple, conventional and geared toward commercialization. The following part is his statement about *Pylon*:

But in several other respects, the novel is pure Hollywood. Not only does it reprise material and character types from Faulkner’s story treatment “Flying the Mail,” but it also exhibits a number of characteristics that replicate movies of the 1930s: an action-packed story of adventurous, larger-than-life characters; an exploitative interest in love and sex; a simple and linear story line; strong, realistic dialogue; and in the description of Shumann’s death, a heroic, redemptive ending. (Hamblin 20)

These critical stances in the previous studies result in a simplistic view that reduce *Pylon* to what might be called a literary adaptation of typical Hollywood films by Faulkner. However, the influence of Hollywood on *Pylon* was not all about simple plots, dialogues, themes and so on like Hamblin or others have pointed out. While Hamblin calls *Pylon* the first of Faulkner’s filmic fiction, he only focuses on superficial elements of *Pylon* as cinematic. In this thesis, I will argue that *Pylon* is not so much a work to prove that Faulkner has yielded to Hollywood’s commercialism as a work to protest against it.

## **1. Examining the Validity of Laura Mulvey’s Male Gaze Theory**

In order to understand Hollywood influence on *Pylon* more essentially, it is necessary to understand what exactly “Hollywood” stood for especially when Faulkner was working there. In addition to its commercialized aspect, Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s were not free from a patriarchal ideology that was dominant at the period.

Laura Mulvey’s male gaze theory, which was first introduced in 1975 and made a significant impact on feminist film studies afterwards, investigates this patriarchal ideology in Hollywood. Mulvey is analyzing Hollywood films in the

1930s when Faulkner was working in the Hollywood studio. She even uses *To Have and Have Not* (1944), which Faulkner wrote the script for, to prove her theory. Hence contextually, this theory is suitable when we think about the relationship between Faulkner's works and movies. This theory could help us explain why he hated Hollywood back then.

According to Mulvey, Hollywood movies are made only for male visual pleasure. In describing how male spectators obtain visual pleasure, she made two major points, which we shall see respectively in the following part.

The first of the two theoretical assumptions is the voyeuristic fantasy. According to Mulvey, the relationship between the audience of a film and what they watch on screen is oriented and controlled by a certain set of film techniques.

... [T]he mass mainstream film, and the convention within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. (Mulvey 60)

The male audience possesses the privilege to peep at the female actor in such dark places as the theater without being looked back at. In the theater, the male audience members are anonymous and thus experience a sense of security. In classical Hollywood movies, there exists an unwritten rule that prohibits the actors from looking at the recording camera, which is synonymous with the male audience himself.

While the male audience possesses the freedom of looking at the actresses without being looked back at, the male actors never become the target of the erotic gaze. Mulvey attributes this asymmetry of gaze to the male social domination over women. The following part explains how it works when the audience is looking at the male actors:

A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. (Mulvey 63; underlines mine)

She goes on to mentioning the well-known Lacanian concept of mirror stage to

support her theory. In this way, the male audience is able to recreate a “more complete, more perfect” version of himself through self-projecting himself with male protagonists. In addition to that, it is part of male audience’s pleasure to possess the female character with the hero: “through participation in his [the male protagonist’s] power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too” (Mulvey 64).

Mulvey's theory explains not only the psychological state of the mass audience but the narrative pattern of films. Male protagonists are usually the ones who are important in the story plot. Unlike the female actors, the male protagonists are neither to be looked at erotically nor function to freeze the frame since they are the ones that carry out actions essential to the plot.

So in this way, male audience has two different kinds of pleasure when watching classical Hollywood cinema. One is to look at the female actors from a voyeuristic point of view and the other is to self-project himself to the male actors. It is not surprising that Mulvey's avant-garde theory had a great impact on academic analysis of Hollywood films. After all, films are invented to satisfy people’s voyeuristic fantasy.

However, it is also true that Mulvey’s male gaze theory has been widely criticized on the ground that, first of all, it only focuses on women as victims of the male gaze. It fails to consider the gaze of the homosexual people as well as the existence of female spectators entirely. It was Mary Anne Doane, another eminent feminist film scholar, who attempted to analyze female sexuality through the aspect of film audience by further developing Mulvey’s male gaze theory. She uses the concept of masquerade to explain how both female audience and female actors use femininity as something that is removable.

The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as precisely, imagistic. (Doane 138)

Doane, who suggested the possibility for the space of female subjectivity through the concept of masquerade, has improved on Mulvey’s theory as the latter denies any subjectivity of actresses and female audience.

Although Mulvey's theory has its limitations, they reflect the limitations of typical Hollywood movies themselves. Even in the survey taken in 2014 by Stacy L. Smith, after 80 years since Faulkner's time, most directors, cameramen, producers and scriptwriters in Hollywood are male. On the other hand, out of the top one hundred box office hits, 26.4 percent portray female nudity whereas only 9 percent include male nudity. Thus it has been statistically proven that the gaze of the camera is one of men's. That is to say, the male audience's gaze still matches the camera's gaze. Even till this day, Hollywood remains a male dominated society and that is why Mulvey's male gaze theory retains validity to explain the most typical Hollywood movies.

To state in advance, my interpretation of *Pylon* reveals that it transcends the dominantly conventional narrative which Mulvey has employed. In other words, this paper investigates how Faulkner resisted the cultural mainstream of the said period. It is important that we do not underestimate the oppressive coercion with which the cultural conditions in general, in one or another, influence the creation of the works of art. Faulkner's novel is, in a sense, an answer to the question of how one could create one's own work without ending up being merely another cultural product of mass consumptions. Thus Mulvey's theory remains useful as a framework to clarify what oppressive forces the work attempted to resist in its own way.

## **2. A Metaphorical Screen Between the Characters**

*Pylon* is indeed another version of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. There are several mentions to Eliot's works in *Pylon* to indicate how the theme of this novel is inspired by this poet. Thus, this novel is basically about the sorrow over the mechanized world that is partly defined by the mass production and deindividuation. In a way, cinema is a work of mass production. The actors who appear on the screen are ghost-like images produced millions of times by a movie projector. Novels, obviously, is another production that benefits from the mass production. But, as Bluestone claims, film is an art whose limits depend on mass audience and industrial production while novel is a form of an art whose limits depend on limited audience and individual creation (64). Even though Faulkner does not criticize films directly in the novel, Faulkner's disgust for mass production includes that for the films.

In the novel, Faulkner first represents a dichotomy between the humane world and the mechanized world. For the reporter, the protagonist, the airplanes and

barnstormers are the symbols of the mechanized world as opposed to the world where he lives. According to critics such as Olga W. Vickery and Vivian Wagner, this notion of dichotomy is reversed in the end: "... [H]is [Reporter's] view of them [the Shumanns] undergoes a dramatic reversal" (Vickery 145). The planes and the barnstormers, what had once been a symbol of the mechanized world, have gradually become the symbol of freedom, passion and humanity of the new world.

In this thesis, I will argue this breakdown of dichotomy in a different light. I will use cinematic structure. I posit that there exists a metaphorical screen between the reporter side and the barnstormer side, which makes the reporter a voyeur / audience and the barnstormers actors on the screen.

Firstly, the stunt flying performed by the Shumann family, especially the female member of the family, Laverne, symbolizes the peepshow in the air. Wagner explains in her essay as follows:

The air show—like the movies, and like filmed pornography, two newly expanding public entertainments—were places to seek titillation and excitement. (80)

She points out here the relationship between airshows and movies, both of which have visual voyeuristic pleasure on the bases.

Laverne jumps off from the airplane showing her exposed legs, which indicates that one of the main goals of the show is to excite male audience sexually: "She [Laverne] wore skirts; they had decided that her exposed legs would not only be a drawing card but that in the skirt no one would doubt that she was a woman..." (*Pylon* 171). The most erotic scene in *Pylon* is where Laverne and Shumann have sex on the airplane and Laverne jumps off from the airplane afterwards with her clothes ripped off. The male audience become "mob" and long to see her and touch her. One of them becomes so aroused that he exclaims "I'll pay her [Laverne]! ... Let me fuck her once and you can cut me if you want" (176). Laverne is like a porn star who gathers male erotic attention on a daily basis. The reporter, like the other man, is sexually attracted to Laverne as can be seen from the fact that he answers "yes" when he was asked "Maybe you [the reporter] wanted to go to bed with her [Laverne] yourself?" (89).

There are several references to the movie or other visual media in *Pylon*,

which indicates that as a modernist writer, Faulkner was very conscious of the movie that was a new media to tell a story. One of the notable references to the visual equipment cited below helps us understand the reporter's voyeuristic nature.

No sound, as though it had not been a steam train which quitted the station two seconds ago but rather the shadow of one of the magic lantern screen until the child's vagrant and restless hand came and removed the slide.  
(*Pylon* 249)

Here, the reporter remembers the whole incident with the Shumann family and describes it as if he were watching the magic lantern screen. The magic lantern, popular among Victorian households, is a visual equipment into which one peeps to get entertained.

In *Pylon*, the figure of the reporter is strongly connected to T.S. Eliot's J.A. Prufrock. Faulkner intentionally pays homage to Eliot's *The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock*. It is clear from the fact that he named one of the chapters in *Pylon* as "The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock." Prufrock is a voyeur himself. As he cannot keep in touch with the real world and the real woman, he becomes a voyeur. David Trotter, who analyzes the relationship between modernism literature and cinema, has pointed out how Prufrock is described as a voyeur. He mentions as follows:

*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is indeed a love song: the love song of a voyeur equipped with a telescope, or a movie camera, or a page or two in a modern novel. (Trotter 129; underlines mine)

At the same time, Trotter points out how magic lantern is used in Eliot's *The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock*.

The magic lantern—the kind of technology, genteel and old-fashioned, with which Prufrock feels at home—intervenes. It cannot restore meaning to experience. But its automatism has created a pattern, there, on the screen, for exploration, which Prufrock alone would have been incapable



of creating. (Trotter 130)

What could be pointed out regarding Prufrock in terms of his nature as a voyeur and in terms of the use of the magic lantern can be pointed out for the reporter in *Pylon* as well because Faulkner intentionally made the reporter similar to Prufrock. A newspaper reporter, as an occupation, is a professional voyeur since each day he / she seek for the scandals to entertain people by observing people from an anonymous point of view. In *Pylon*, even though being the main character, the reporter is never given an individual name. He is an anonymous character, who is behind the front stage and can be anyone sitting on a seat in the dark theater.

In the early part of *Pylon*, in the scenes where the reporter and the Shumann family are together, whereas the family members exchange gazes among themselves, the reporter's eyes never meet the family's, especially Laverne's eyes. The following quotes exemplify this: "She [Laverne] looked at him [the reporter] now: the pale stare without curiosity, perfectly grave, perfectly blank..." (*Pylon* 22). Another exemplification is as follows: "When he [the reporter] approached her [Laverne] she looked full at him for a moment, with pale blank complete unrecognition..." (*Pylon* 52). Even though Laverne looks at the reporter, she does not even recognize him fully. Although the reporter keeps casting his gaze upon Laverne, their eyes are never met.

Then he [Shumann] looked at the woman [Laverne]. The reporter looked at her too. She had not moved, yet she now stood in a more complete and somehow terrific immobility in the stained trenchcoat, a cigarette burning in the grained and blackrimmed fingers of one hand, looking at Shumann with naked and urgent concentration. (*Pylon* 54)

When both Shumann and the reporter look at Laverne, she only looks back at Shumann. There is a genuine communication through the gaze within the Shumann family. This communication rarely occurs between the reporter and any of the family members. This illustrates how the reporter is distanced from the Shumann family. Even though the reporter shares the same time and space with them unlike the relationship between actors and audiences, there is no proper communication between them as though an invisible screen distances him

from them. The reporter keeps watching, or peeping them although his gaze will not be returned. This reinforces his characteristics as a voyeur / cinema audience.

While giving Laverne an erotic gaze, the reporter tries to identify himself with Roger Shumann, the male and the heroic member of the Shumann family. This is the second way that Mulvey pointed out through which the male audience achieves visual pleasure. The citation below shows how the reporter comes to view the Shumanns as his own company and starts to call himself as one of them even though he is not related to them at all.

“Oh.” He [The reporter] smiled down at her [Laverne].

“The ship. We flew it, tested it over there. We made a field hop before we—”

“We?”

“Yes. I went with him [Shumann]....” (*Pylon* 195; underlines mine)

Jiggs, the mechanic, also questions who the reporter is referring to when he says “we” in a scene close to this.

Male audience’s self-identification with the heroic characters occurs easily especially when watching a movie since, as Trotter analyzes, they do not have flesh and blood.

They can “spread themselves” over a film, “and they *can’t* over a live performer.” Extraordinary feats “done on the film” pose little threat because they do not involve “flesh-and-blood people.” The “life” movies possess in a function of people who watch them, who therefore find in them nothing to be jealous of. (Trotter 24)

As David Trotter mentioned above, the reporter claims that the Shumanns do not possess “flesh and blood.”

Because they aint human like us; they couldn’t turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn’t want to or dare to if they just had human brains. Burn them like this one tonight and they don’t even holler in the fire; crash one and it aint even blood when they haul him out: it’s cylinder oil the same as in the crankcase. (*Pylon* 37)

The reporter is able to identify himself with Roger Shumann without feeling jealous because he does not see the Shumanns as realistic human beings. Neither does he objectify Roger Shumann for the same reason. Indeed, Roger Shumann is like someone across the screen. At the same time, the reporter can cast an erotic gaze to Laverne without being embarrassed or without any hesitation because for him, Laverne does not appear as a realistic person either. He sees her partly as a commodity without real flesh and blood.

So far I have demonstrated how the reporter tries to obtain visual pleasure, which is structurally modeled after the typical system in which Hollywood movies give pleasure to the male oriented audience. There exists a metaphorical screen between those two worlds that places the reporter in a secure place like the darkness of the theater. However, in the end, this structure is destroyed.

### **3. Breakdown of the Screen**

At the end of the novel, one comes to realize that the reporter fails to go through the process of achieving male oriented visual pleasure from his distant strange relationship with the barnstormers as well as satisfy himself in the end, which ends up making him change his notion about the barnstormers as Vickery says.

There are many scenes in the novel where the reporter's figure is reflected on the mirror or the glass. As Lacan's mirror stage theory which Mulvey has incorporated in her own theory points out, there is a strong connection between the action of one looking at the screen and that of one looking at the mirror. According to this theory, if the reporter succeeds in self-identifying with Roger Shumann, he should see a perfect, ideal ego when he looks at himself in the mirror. The citation below is the first scene where the reporter's figure is reflected on the glass.

In a dark plate window, sidelonging, he [the reporter] walked beside himself; stopping and turning so that for the moment shadow and reflection superposed he stared full at himself as though he still saw the actual shoulder sagging beneath the dead afternoon phantom burden, and saw reflected beside him yet the sweater and the skirt and the harsh pallid hair as, bearing the oblivions and archadulthood. (*Pylon* 45)

In this scene, the reporter almost sees Laverne's figure along with her child in the mirror beside himself. This shows that the reporter at this point, who tries to identify himself with Roger Shumann, is going through the process of possessing the heroine as the hero / Roger Shumann does. This is what Mulvey suggested as one of the kinds of pleasure male audience gets.

However, the following scenes suggest that the reporter is not at all successful in this self-projection onto Roger Shumann: "He [the reporter] faced himself in the dark glass, long and light and untidy as a bundle of laths dressed in human garments" (*Pylon* 45). In this scene, the reporter's reflection reveals his miserable figure. His ego is not in any way, idealized nor enlarged. As the next quote shows, the reporter's figure is not even reflected in the mirror: "He [The reporter] walked into no reflection now, since darkness was behind him" (*Pylon* 156). The next scene depicts the reporter in a more dejected state:

He [the reporter] removed even his shirt to wash, fingering gingerly the left side of his face, leaning to the blunt wavering mirror the replica of his gingerly grimace as he moved his jaw back and forth as he contemplated the bluish autograph of violence upon his diplomacolored flesh like tattooing.... (*Pylon* 178)

The mirror is "wavering," that is to say, it not only shows his real figure as he is, but it shows his distorted self. He also has a scar here. Thus, as the story proceeds, the reflected figure of the reporter in the mirror or glass deteriorates. He does not only fail to enlarge or idealize his ego but also becomes even more miserable than his own self in the mirror.

On the other hand, Mr. Hagood, the editor of the newspaper company which the reporter works for, also sees a reflection of himself on the same glass. One can see a stark contrast between the reflection of the reporter and that of Hagood. Whereas the reporter's figure in the mirror or glass shows a degraded version of himself or nothing at all, the figure of Hagood shows just as he is.

In any case, the reporter fails to undergo the process of enlarging his ego through reflecting himself in the mirror. He never sees the Roger Shumann-like heroic figure in the glass or mirror but instead he sees a very miserable, sometimes distorted version of his own self. In the end, the reporter even loses Roger Shumann, whom he self-projects himself to, as Shumann dies.

Secondly, we can also see his failure in seeing Laverne from a secure place and obtaining the voyeuristic pleasure. If the reporter were to have the visual pleasure through seeing a sexualized Laverne from a voyeur's point of view, then the author should have denied Laverne's subjectivity, and she should never look at the reporter directly.

However, as the reporter gradually delves into the real life of Shumanns, Laverne starts to recognize the reporter as well as give an intentional gaze to him. In the end, she not only looks at Shumann directly but also rejects him.

Perhaps it was the added weight because she [Laverne] turned, still running, and gave him [the reporter] a single pale cold terrible look, crying, "God damn you to hell! Get away from me!" (*Pylon* 207)

In this scene, Laverne's cold look of rejection drags him out from the secure theater-like place he was in and threatens him. According to Mulvey's theory, the male audience is supposed to be safe and kept from being hurt. However, in this scene, he gets hurt and gets involved with the situation himself instead. This also shows how the reporter completely fails in the process of possessing the heroine in place of a hero by self-identifying himself with the hero.

This process fails because in reality, both Roger Shumann and Laverne are flesh and blood people. The name "Shumann" includes the word "human." Roger Shumann is not a semblance nor a ghostly figure that is only reflected on the screen but he is a man made of flesh and blood after all. Because of that, he dies at the end when the plane crashes. Laverne is not only a porn star who could only gather men's erotic attention, but also a very strong woman who controls her life and her sexuality as well. She goes against the stereotypical feminine woman. She can control how sexy she can be as a woman. When she first appears in front of the reporter, she is described as "looking almost like a man" (18). She always wears unisex trench coat except when she jumps off from the plane as a performer. Laverne's ambiguous sexuality is repeatedly described through the description of what she wears. For example, "the woman [Laverne] who somehow even contrived to wear the skirt beneath the sexless trenchcoat as any one of the three men would" (68). As Mary Anne Doane points out, she can wear and remove her womanliness like a masquerade. She wears masquerade of womanliness when she appears to public as a performer but takes it off as she likes. As such, her character transcends the male / female dichotomy, which is

another dichotomy Faulkner resists aside from humane / mechanical one. After all, Hollywood films back then are so patriarchal that it has male / female dichotomy and over-simplify the issue of gender and sexuality. Laverne is an antithesis of this.

I have attempted to explain how the reporter fails to obtain visual pleasure circumscribed by the Hollywoodian male-oriented system. Faulkner mocks that system in the novel. In this way, Faulkner criticizes the male dominant ideology based on commercialism in Hollywood.

## **Conclusion**

Through the analysis of *Pylon* using a theory that is common in the field of film studies, I have shown how Faulkner, who has witnessed a patriarchal ideology in Hollywood and felt a strong resistance against it, incorporates that very ideology in the novel and eventually destroys it. The reporter fails to obtain visual pleasure because he realizes that there is no metaphorical screen between him and the barnstormers. In that way, Faulkner claims that there is no clear division between the mechanized world and the humane world. The borders are ambiguous and the world is more complicated than is represented by the two binary oppositions. The same applies to sexuality. There is more than mere femininity and masculinity. Laverne's complicated sexuality and her use of the metaphorical mask (she possesses control over what she wears, as well as her sexuality) suggest that being able to subjectively control who she is gives her more freedom.

Restrictions in society, cultural mainstreams, patriarchal systems that are connected to commercialism are still dominant in today's society. The dysfunctional metaphorical screen is a tool for Faulkner to transcend these norms. Faulkner's venturing into Hollywood made him realize a certain cultural trend there, which is the patriarchal ideology that allows only male pleasure when watching a film. By mocking that, Faulkner protests against Hollywood in this novel.

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## ハリウッドへの抗議 ——フォークナーの*Pylon* にみる映画的構造の創造と破壊——

西岡かれん

**論文要旨:** アメリカ文学を代表する作家の一人であるウィリアム・フォークナーが、実は長期間にわたってハリウッドで脚本家として働いていたという事実はあまり知られていない。本論文では、フォークナーのマイナー作品 *Pylon* を取り上げ、ローラ・マルヴィーによるフェミニスト映画理論を援用した分析を試みることにより、フォークナーとハリウッドの関連について考察する。マルヴィーは、古典的ハリウッド映画は、観客から女優に対して向けられる視線の性質において、父権的イデオロギーを再生産する装置であると指摘している。筆者は、*Pylon* の男性主人公が他者に送る視線等の分析をすることにより、本作品における主人公と他の登場人物との関係性が、ハリウッド映画の女優と観客の関係性を模倣して描かれているということを発見した。さらに、小説のなかでこの関係性の最終的な破綻を描くことにより、フォークナーが *Pylon* 執筆を通し、自らが脚本家として働いていた 1930 年代のハリウッドで支配的であった、父権主義に基づく商業的構造を批判していたのではないかという可能性を考慮した。